

XII. Fresh Pond Reservation Recreation Policy

A. Introduction

The Fresh Pond Reservation offers a very wide variety of opportunities to all ages for both active and passive recreation. Among the seasonal and year-round activities within the Reservation's boundaries are walking in the relative quiet of an urban wild; observing and studying plants and wildlife; jogging; running; sledding; cross-country skiing; nine holes at the Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. Golf Course; soccer, softball, tennis and basketball at Glacken Field; and, for Cambridge residents, walking a dog off-leash in specified areas.

The recreational activities offered within the Reservation's boundaries must be governed by the Reservation's primary function as a public drinking water protection area and as the only City-owned parkland of size with a wild character. To preserve and protect these essential functions, this Recreation Policy addresses Reservation locations and seasons that can best handle intense recreational use.

Within the Reservation's boundaries are two active recreation areas, the Municipal Golf Course, managed, maintained and supervised by the Recreation Division, and



*Figure 21: Sledding at Fresh Pond Reservation
Photo by Janice Snow, 1978*

Glacken Field, maintained by the Department of Public Works. These active recreation areas and any new athletic field sited in the Neville Manor area should be permitted by the Recreation Division and follow state-of-the-art environmental stewardship practices established for the golf course in collaboration with the Water Department. The remainder of the Reservation landscape should be under the direct management and supervision of the Water Department.

To better manage the Reservation for the health, safety and convenience of all users, a clearly defined and updated permitting process is needed for large group recreational activities and for walking dogs off-leash.

B. Recreational Resource Management Priorities and Goals

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Some areas of the Reservation are inherently more appropriate for intense recreational uses than are others due to their location (including proximity to water bodies), soil type, hydrology, topography and/or vegetation. In addition, seasonal variations in environmental conditions and user demands render some areas less able to sustain certain forms of recreational use for part of each year. These Master Plan recreational policies and proposals reflect these environmental factors in designating the type, level, and timing of use that an area can sustain. Given sufficient resources and protected buffers, three key areas continue to serve as sustained active recreational use areas: Glacken Field, the Perimeter Road, and the Municipal Golf Course.

1. Glacken Field

The Glacken Field Playground site, a flat area along Huron Avenue, set back from and above the Reservoir water table, should be able to maintain the heavy stress of frequent organized, active, intensive recreational uses such as softball, soccer, basketball and other team sport practices and games. The area also supports a well-equipped tot lot and should continue to do so unless a new location is desired and found in the adjacent neighborhood. The current field conditions and paved courts at Glacken are deteriorated and in need of redesign and restoration in order to serve sustained, frequent group athletic use.

2. Glacken Buffer Zones

The back edge of Glacken Field borders on a highly eroded slope extending to the shoreline along the Perimeter Road. To protect the water supply and Perimeter Road from siltation and repair the hillside vegetation, a strip along the rear edge of the field should be designated as an environmental barrier and planted with vegetation only or vegetated fence to divert human and dog traffic to less-sensitive pathways to the shoreline. The design of this protective strip should be incorporated into redesign plans for Glacken Field

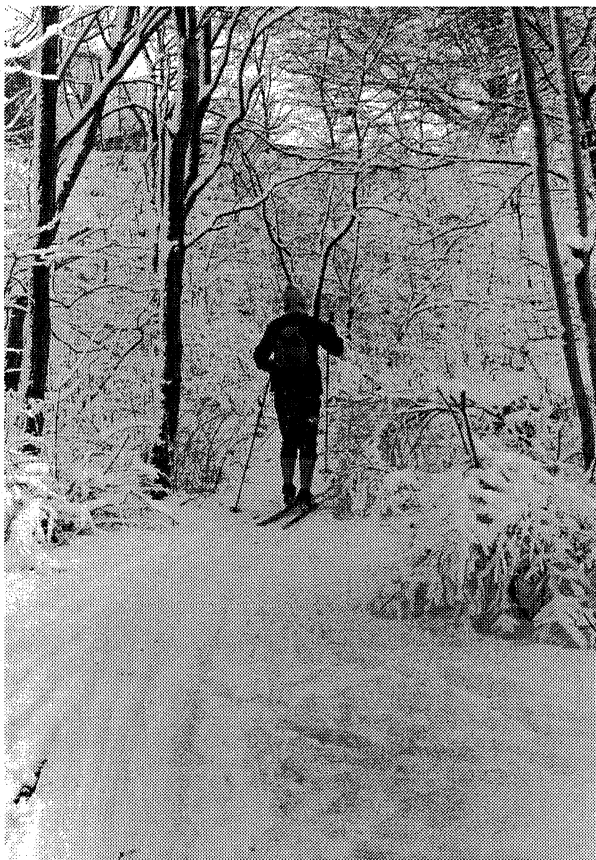


Figure 22: Cross Country Skiing at Fresh Pond Reservation Photo by Janice Snow, 1978

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and for restoring the hillside ecology, both priority projects. Ideally, the projects will be designed in conjunction with each other. The hillside restoration must include the barrier buffer strip, and both areas should be developed and maintained under the supervision of the Water Department.

3. Perimeter Road

The Perimeter Road can and should continue to accommodate a variety of recreational uses, including walking, wheelchair use, jogging and authorized running events, dog walking and slow bicycle riding. Materials used to resurface this roadway and maintenance policies should be designed to accommodate multiple, high-level uses of the roadway for recreation, maintenance and emergency vehicles, while offering substantial ecological and aesthetic benefits. To manage stormwater runoff and to protect edge vegetation and aesthetics while allowing high-level recreation use of the Perimeter Road, any road resurfacing and/or relocation should incorporate the ecological design and management recommendations outlined in the Stewardship Plan (See Stewardship Plan Sections 2.7 and 3.1.9).

4. Municipal Golf Course

The Recreation Division manages thousands of rounds of golf in season at the Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. Municipal Golf Course, the only recreation facility at the Reservation supporting maintenance by charging a fee. The golf course is committed to environmentally sensitive management practices, and is continually updating those practices. With sufficient snow pack, the golf course fairways can support cross-country skiing in the winter months.



Figure 23: Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. Municipal Golf Course, 1998
Source: Rizzo Associates, Inc., Summer 1998

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5. Golf Course Buffer Zones

Along and among the course fairways are sensitive wetland buffers, historical groves of specimen trees, streams, ponds and meadows supporting a variety of wildlife and native plant species. Section 3.4 of the Stewardship Plan includes many recommendations supported by this Master Plan for improving both the golfing experience and the ecological conditions of this largest landscape within the Reservation.

C. Recreational Policies and Permitting System

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1. Overview of Issues

To balance recreational needs and create safe enjoyment for all Cambridge residents, a fair and coordinated Reservation-wide permitting system is essential. The following updated Reservation permitting system is designed to minimize conflict among authorized activities and to protect all visitors, the water supply, and the Reservation landscape against irresponsible, dangerous, destructive and illegal activities.

Permits will be required for organized, active uses such as team sports and road races, and for organized uses such as arts festivals, charity events and organizational picnics which bring large groups to the Reservation or result in high concentrations of people in particular places such as Kingsley Park (See Sections D and E, below).

A portable, temporary sign template shall be distributed with group permits and temporary signs shall be placed in designated areas by sponsors of road races, cross-country races and other permitted special events, and by Cambridge public and private schools as detailed in the Public Facilities and Services section of the Master Plan (Section XIII).

A permitting process governing school group usage of the Reservation is discussed separately under Master Plan Education Policy (Section X).

2. Dog Walking

Currently, Cambridge residents, as defined by the Animal Control Ordinance (Cambridge Municipal Code), are allowed to release their dogs from the leash at designated areas in the Fresh Pond Reservation, provided they are "under voice control." No other persons are given a permit of any kind to release their dogs from the leash in Cambridge.

To enable the City to enforce its existing animal control ordinance governing dogs at Fresh Pond, distinctive medallions should be provided to these Cambridge dog owners. To qualify for a medallion, the Cambridge resident must accept responsibility for any damage the dog may cause to other dogs, persons, or property (See Section F, below).

D. Site-Specific Recreational Policies

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1. Municipal Golf Course

Currently, during the golf season, the golf course is limited to recreational use by golfers. Existing signs publicize this restriction. The golf course use policy should also be published in publicly available documents and brochures. Golf course use signs should follow the notification and educational policy recommendations for signs (Section XIII) and be included as part of golf course improvement projects. A common-sense set of regulations governing use of the golf course by persons other than golfers needs to be drawn up, recorded formally and posted suitably. These regulations should list low-intensity recreational activities that are officially authorized during periods when the course is closed for golf. In addition, these notices should specify the locations and conditions in which such activities will be allowed.

2. Glacken Field

Common-sense regulations also need to be drawn up, recorded formally and posted suitably to govern the use of Glacken Field and the adjacent tennis courts and basketball court.

The Land-Use Policy of this Master Plan (Section IX) recommends that the City give high priority to a comprehensive redesign study of the entire Glacken facility. New recreational use policies may result from such a study.

3. Perimeter Road and Undeveloped Areas

New policies governing recreational use of the undeveloped remainder of the Reservation should be established formally, especially for adult road races, for school cross-country meets, for walkathons and other charity events, and for large group picnics and parties.

Policies governing individual, family and small, group activities also should be established, and prohibited activities should be identified.

E. Permitted Events

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1. Road Races

Races shall be run on the Perimeter Road only, and food and refreshments shall be limited to simple water stations. Organizers shall inform all participants that use of Reservation parking lots is limited to persons with Cambridge resident stickers. Organizers and participants from all communities shall assist in maintaining the course from time to time throughout the year.

Currently, two adult road racing series and two annual adult running events are conducted at the Reservation without formal, official approval. All are sponsored by Cambridge residents and organizations. All races are run on the Perimeter Road only. The two series consist of races conducted on Saturday mornings year-round and summer races conducted on Thursday evenings.

The two road racing series and two annual adult running events should formally be grandfathered as allowed uses, subject to a requirement that all organizers shall be Cambridge residents and shall submit a yearly request to the Water Department for a permit to conduct their races and events.

Organizers shall instruct participants to observe the rights of other users of the Perimeter Road carefully. The Water Department shall inform the general public of race dates and times, and shall remind all Reservation users of their responsibility to keep the road open to a two-way flow of traffic.

These measures will help keep conflict between groups of runners and other users of the Perimeter Road to a minimum at current levels of organized use. Because higher use levels of organized races would severely restrict use to all other Cambridge residents, no permits should be issued for additional racing series or running events. In addition, the Water Department should monitor the level of participation in the two approved series and two running events carefully, to prevent participation from reaching unmanageable numbers.

2. Cross-Country Meets

Public and private schools currently use the Reservation for cross-country meets. Formal approval for these events has not been sought from the Recreation Division or Water Department, nor has any permit been sought to conduct them. Cross-country races pose a very real threat to the stability of slopes and banks subject to erosion and to the health of vegetation in sensitive environments. This threat must be reduced to a minimum.

Sponsorship of future cross-country meets must be limited to Cambridge public and private schools, whose athletic departments shall be required to submit a yearly permit request and race schedule to the Water Department. These requests should be submitted sufficiently far in advance of the beginning of the academic year to prevent scheduling conflicts from arising.

Meets shall be limited to a maximum of three teams at a time, and participation shall be limited to manageable numbers. Large-scale championship races shall not be permitted on the Reservation. Permits shall require that organizers and participants assist in maintaining the cross-country course as necessary throughout the year.

Meet directors shall be required to instruct all students of the purpose and proper use of the Reservation, including the need to protect environmentally fragile areas and the need to respect the rights of other users of the Perimeter Road. The Water Department shall alert other users of the Perimeter Road to cross-country race dates and times, and shall remind other users of their responsibility to keep the road open to a two-way flow of traffic.

Permits shall require that all school teams arrive at the Reservation by public transportation or by chartered bus. Buses shall be parked in designated spaces in the parking lot north of the Water Treatment Plant on Fresh Pond Parkway, and shall be forbidden from using the Kingsley Park lot because of traffic safety problems. Parents and friends of students from other communities shall be informed that no parking for their private cars will be available within the Reservation. Any additional permitting exceptions or restrictions for these types of events will be set by the Water Department, Recreation Division and Fresh Pond Advisory Board.

A single official cross-country course shall be designed by the Fresh Pond Master Plan Advisory Board with the assistance of recognized authorities, representatives from Cambridge schools and the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities. The course design shall provide for minimum possible negative environmental impact. The design shall be subject to the approval of the Water Board and Water Department.

3. Walkathons and Other Charity Events

Walkathons shall be limited to the Perimeter Road. Permits shall be required, shall be issued by the Water Department, and shall be limited to Cambridge-based charities and non-profits and to Cambridge schools raising money for recognized local or national charities or raising money to support school programs. Written proof of the supporting organization's headquarters and non-profit status will be required.

The Water Department should consider whether the good of the Reservation and of other users of the Perimeter Road requires that an upper limit be placed on the number of participants in walkathons and similar charity events which often involve many hundreds of people. In any case, the Department shall require that organizers of events involving more than 100 people provide for adequate supervision of participants by police details, School Department officials or adult monitors. The Water Department shall also require that organizers inform participants of the need to respect fragile environments, respect the rights of other users of the Perimeter Road, and keep the road open to a two-way flow of traffic. The Water Department shall inform other users of upcoming events and times.

Permits shall require the use of chartered buses using designated spaces in the parking lot north of the Water Treatment Plant on Fresh Pond Parkway. Buses shall be forbidden from parking in the Kingsley Park lot. Participants from other communities shall

be informed that no parking for their private cars will be available. Non-resident, Cambridge School teachers who are serving as monitors may park at the Tobin School parking lot when spaces are available there.

4. Large Group Picnics, Parties and Similar Activities

Permits shall be required for large group picnics, parties and other activities to which people bring food and drink. Such activities shall be limited to the lookout area of Kingsley Park and to Glacken Field, which can accept intensive use and where trash receptacles can easily be provided for these events as part of the permitting process. No such large group activities shall be allowed in Weir Meadow, which shall be reserved for smaller family picnics. A large group shall be defined as 25 or more persons, including children.

F. Individual, Small Group and Family Activities

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No permits are required for individual, family or small group activities such as walking, jogging, running, sledding, skiing, birding, bicycling and picnicking. But the Water Department shall limit such activities to designated areas as appropriate, and shall inform visitors of rules and regulations and needs to protect sensitive environments. For example, bicycling shall be limited to the Perimeter Road and family picnics and parties shall be limited to Kingsley Park and Weir Meadow.

As necessary, Water Department staff shall remind participants in such activities of the need to observe the rights of others to quiet, peaceful enjoyment of the Reservation. Users are expected to use earphones with audio equipment and to remove or dispose in proper receptacles their own waste (as well as their children's and/or animal's waste).

1. Ice Skating

Ice-skating is currently prohibited at the Reservation for reasons of safety (see below). Ice-skating will be permitted at facilities provided for the purpose by the Recreation Division and Water Department, if and when such facilities become available. Possibilities for creating such facilities are under discussion.

2. Dog Walking

Individual, family and small group recreational activities include walking licensed dogs both on the leash and off. A Cambridge City ordinance permits dogs owned by Cambridge residents, as defined by statute, to be walked or run off the leash at Fresh Pond, provided the dogs are under voice control and that the dogs not be allowed to romp on grassy areas.

Unfortunately, the City currently lacks the means to enforce the existing ordinance adequately, to protect the environment, to provide for public safety, and to ensure that

no dogs other than those owned by qualified Cambridge residents are being walked or run at the Reservation unleashed, as intended by the City Council.

The ordinance must be enforced so that the Reservation will not be overrun by dogs owned by non-Cambridge residents. Some Fresh Pond users have estimated that approximately 30 to 40 percent of the dogs now being let off leash at the Reservation are brought in by residents of neighboring towns such as Arlington, Belmont and Somerville. Further, there is speculation that increased enforcement of leash laws in these neighboring towns will cause the number of non-Cambridge dogs off-leash at Fresh Pond to grow. This could result in serious problems, including degradation of the landscape and conflicts among recreational users of the Reservation.

As a step towards enabling the Cambridge ordinance to be enforced, it is recommended that the Water Department adopt a medallion program for qualified Cambridge resident dog owners who wish to walk or run their dogs off-leash at the Reservation. Under the program, Cambridge dog owners would request a colorful medallion for their dog(s) to wear in the Reservation, along with their Cambridge dog licenses. Use of medallions at Fresh Pond would permit Water Department staff to readily identify dogs entitled to be walked or run off the leash, and would help make fair and efficient enforcement of the existing ordinance possible. Similar medallion programs have been implemented successfully in other cities.

Once the medallion program is under way, the Water Department and the Master Plan Advisory Board should work with qualified Cambridge resident dog owners to give practical, concrete meaning to the terms "romp" and "under voice control" used in the ordinance.

G. Prohibited Recreational Activities

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Use of skateboards will be prohibited because it is believed they pose a threat to the safety of visitors and to road and pathway surfaces. Individual inline skaters will be encouraged to seek opportunities for high-speed travel elsewhere, as will individual bicyclists who must yield the right-of-way to slower-moving traffic, including pedestrians, dog-owners, joggers, runners and persons with disabilities, except along the MDC Bikepath.

No large group or small group events involving skateboarding, inline skating or bicycling will be permitted in the Reservation. Persons wishing to hold such events at the Reservation will be informed of opportunities to apply for use of other City-owned facilities.

For reasons of safety, ice-skating will not be permitted on the Reservation's existing ponds, including Little Fresh Pond, North Pond and Black's Nook. Nor will anyone be allowed to walk on the ice at any of those water bodies, or to permit or encourage a dog to go out on the ice.

No fishing or swimming is allowed in the Reservoir, as required by Department of Environmental Protection regulations governing the safety of public water supplies.

H. Recreation Policy Administration

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The Recreation Division will have the authority to administer recreation policy governing uses of the Municipal Golf Course and Glacken Field, including the authority to issue permits for athletic use of Glacken Field and the youth soccer field proposed to be created adjacent to the Neville Manor site. The Cambridge Water Department will have the authority to administer recreation policy governing uses of the remaining areas of the Reservation, including the authority to issue permits for non-athletic use of Glacken Field now issued by the Department of Public Works. This division of responsibilities will simplify matters for applicants and give the Water Department greater control of land adjacent to highly sensitive slopes and banks of water bodies.

The Recreation Division will assist the Water Department in developing permitting forms and procedures.